

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A computer-implemented gaming method, comprising:
configuring a first gaming unit for playing in a tournament, said first gaming unit being selected by a player to play in said tournament, comprising loading gaming software to said first gaming unit;
receiving an identifier at a controller comprising a processor and a memory from said first gaming unit, wherein the tournament is in progress when the identifier is received, wherein the identifier is associated with a tournament game card, and wherein the tournament game card is provided to the player in response to paying a fee;
determining whether the identifier received from the first gaming unit is authentic;
determining a time duration the player may play in the time remaining in the tournament in progress based on the identifier, if the identifier is determined to be authentic;
enabling the first gaming unit to play in the tournament for the time duration if the identifier is determined to be authentic, thereby allowing the player to use the first gaming unit to join the tournament in progress;
receiving a tournament score of the player;
determining a winning player of the tournament, if any; and
if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generating data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.
2. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the identifier is printed on the tournament game card.
3. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the identifier is electronically encoded on the tournament game card.
4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)
6. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein determining the duration based on the identifier comprises retrieving the duration from storage based on the identifier.
7. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein determining the duration based on the identifier comprises decoding the identifier to determine the duration.
8. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the duration comprises an amount of time, the method further comprising:
 - initializing a timer with the determined amount of time;
 - starting the timer;
 - wherein enabling the first gaming unit comprises enabling the first gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running;
 - stopping the timer after the timer has run for the determined amount of time.
9. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 8, further comprising:
 - stopping the timer at a request of the player; and
 - restarting the timer at a request of the player if the timer has not run for the determined amount of time.
10. (Withdrawn) A gaming method according to claim 9, further comprising:
 - storing an indication of a remaining amount of time for the player to play in the tournament after the timer stops; and
 - re-initializing the timer based on the stored indication of the remaining amount of time before the timer restarts.
11. (Withdrawn) A gaming method according to claim 10, further comprising:
 - receiving the identifier from a second gaming unit after the timer stops;
 - determining whether the identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic;

wherein re-initializing the timer comprises re-initializing the timer if the identifier received from the second gaming unit is determined to be authentic; and
enabling the second gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running.

12. (Withdrawn) A gaming method according to claim 11, wherein the timer comprises a first timer implemented by the first gaming unit and a second timer implemented by the second gaming unit;

wherein initializing the timer comprises initializing the first timer;

wherein enabling the first gaming unit comprises enabling the first gaming unit while the first timer is running;

wherein re-initializing the timer comprises initializing the second timer; and

wherein enabling the second gaming unit comprises enabling the second gaming unit for play in the tournament while the second timer is running.

13. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 8, wherein the timer is implemented, at least in part, by the first gaming unit.

14. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 8, wherein the first gaming unit is operatively coupled to the tournament game card, wherein the timer is implemented, at least in part, by the tournament game card.

15. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 8, wherein the timer is implemented, at least in part, by the tournament server.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Previously Presented) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the gaming software comprises at least one of an executable file, a configuration file, a data file, a pay table, and a plurality of seeds for a random number generator.

18. (Original) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the tournament game card comprises at least one of a magnetic swipe card, a smart card, a PC card, and a portable memory device.
19. (Previously Presented) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein receiving the tournament score of the player comprises receiving the tournament score of the player before a timer has stopped.
20. (Previously presented) A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein receiving the tournament score of the player comprises receiving the tournament score of the player after a timer has stopped.
21. (Currently amended) A tournament server, comprising:
a network interface operatively coupled to a network;
a controller operatively coupled to the network interface, the controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor, the controller configured to:
 receive, via the network interface, an identifier from a first gaming unit, wherein the identifier is associated with a tournament game card, wherein the tournament game card is provided to a player in response to paying a fee;
 determine whether the identifier received from the first gaming unit is authentic;
 determine a time duration the player may play in a tournament that is in progress, based on the identifier and time remaining in the tournament, if the identifier is determined to be authentic;
 enable the first gaming unit for play in the tournament for the time duration if the identifier is determined to be authentic;
 receive a tournament score of the player;
 determine a winning player of the tournament, if any; and
 if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generate data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.

22. (Canceled)
23. (Canceled)
24. (Original) A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the controller is configured to retrieve the duration from storage based on the identifier.
25. (Original) A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the controller is configured to decode the identifier to determine the duration.
26. (Original) A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the duration comprises an amount of time, and wherein the controller is further configured to:
- initialize a timer with the amount of time;
 - start the timer;
 - enable the first gaming unit while the timer is running; and
 - stop the timer after the timer has run for the determined amount of time.
27. (Withdrawn) A tournament server according to claim 26, wherein the controller is configured to:
- stop the timer at a request of the player; and
 - restart the timer at a request of the player if the timer has not run for the determined amount of time.
28. (Withdrawn) A tournament server according to claim 27, wherein the controller is configured to:
- store an indication of a remaining amount of time for the player to play in the tournament after the timer has been stopped; and
 - re-initialize the timer based on the stored indication of the remaining amount of time before the timer is restarted.

29. (Withdrawn) A tournament server according to claim 28, wherein the controller is configured to:

- receive the identifier from a second gaming unit after the player stopped the timer;
- determine whether the identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic;
- re-initialize the timer if the identifier received from the second gaming unit is determined to be authentic; and
- enable the second gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running.

30-60. (Canceled)

61. (Currently amended) A computer readable medium including computer executable program code for instructing a computer to operate as follows:

- receive an identifier at a controller comprising a processor and a memory from a first gaming unit configured for playing in a tournament, wherein the tournament is in progress when the identifier is received, wherein the identifier is associated with a tournament game card, and wherein the tournament game card is provided to the player in response to paying a fee;

- determine whether the identifier received from the first gaming unit is authentic;
- determine a time duration the player may play in the time remaining in the tournament in progress based on the identifier, if the identifier is determined to be authentic;

- enable the first gaming unit to play in the tournament for the time duration if the identifier is determined to be authentic, thereby allowing the player to use the first gaming unit to join the tournament in progress;

- receive a tournament score of the player;
- determine a winning player of the tournament, if any; and
- if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generate data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.

62. (Previously presented) A computer-implemented method for allowing a player to join a tournament in progress using a device, comprising:

receiving at a controller comprising a processor and a memory a tournament identifier associated with a player who has selected a first device to play in a tournament between multiple players, wherein the tournament is in progress when the first device is selected by the player for playing the tournament;

determining based on the tournament identifier and the time that the tournament identifier is received whether to allow the player to join the tournament;

determining, based on the tournament identifier a tournament duration indicative of a time duration that the player may play in the tournament in the time remaining in the tournament when it is determined to allow the player to join the tournament; and

enabling the first device to join the tournament for tournament play by the player for the determined tournament duration, thereby allowing the player to use the first device to join the tournament in progress and play in the tournament for the determined tournament duration.

63. (Previously presented) A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 62, wherein the first device is not configured for playing the tournament when the first device is selected by the player for playing the tournament; and

wherein the method further comprises: configuring the first device to join the tournament after the first device is selected by the player for playing the tournament.

64. (Previously presented) A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 62, wherein the determining of whether to allow the player to join the tournament comprises:

determining whether the tournament identifier has been received within a acceptable time window allocated for tournament play.

65. (Withdrawn) A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 62, further comprising:

receiving a request from the player to stop playing the tournament; and

determining and storing the time left for that player to play in the tournament as the player's remaining time in the tournament, thereby allowing the player to resume tournament play using the first device and/or a second device.

66. (Withdrawn) A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 65, further comprising:

- receiving at a controller comprising a processor and a memory an identifier from a second gaming device, wherein the second device has been selected by the player to play in the tournament;

- determining, based on the identifier a second tournament duration that the player may play in the time remaining in the tournament; and

- enabling the second device to play in the tournament for the second tournament duration, thereby allowing the player to use the second device to join the tournament in progress and play in the tournament for the determined amount of time for the player to play the tournament duration.

67. (Currently amended) A computing system including one or more processors adapted for and/or capable of:

- receiving at a controller comprising a processor and a memory a tournament identifier associated with a player who has effectively requested to join a tournament in progress by presenting the tournament identifier;

- determining based on the tournament identifier received whether to allow the player to join the tournament;

- determining, based on the tournament identifier, a tournament time duration that the player may play in the time remaining in the tournament when it is determined to allow the player to join the tournament; and

- enabling the computing system and/or another computing system for tournament play by the player for the determined tournament time duration, thereby allowing the player to join the tournament in progress and play in the tournament for the tournament duration.

68. (Previously presented) A computing system as recited in claim 67, wherein said computing system includes one or more of the following:

- a gaming machine;

- a gaming server comprising said controller; and

- a portable gaming device.